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August 26, 2002

MAINE BULLETIN NO. ME450-2-13

SUBJECT: TCH – Release of Phase I of the Electronic Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG) and August Public Announcement of Availability

Purpose: To announce the release of Phase I of the eFOTG, a SmarTech initiative.

Expiration Date: January, 2003

National Bulletin No. 190-2-1 (June 4, 2002), NRCS announced release of Phase I of the new Web-based electronic version of the Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG). The purpose of this bulletin is to announce the availability of the Maine version of eFOTG as an interactive tool to assist in the delivery of NRCS technical assistance.

The 2002 Farm Bill increases the need for easy access to NRCS technical references and FOTG practice standards, not only by NRCS employees, but also by technical service providers (formerly known as third-party vendors). With the increasing need for electronic accessibility, the Science and Technology Consortium is targeting a two-phase SmarTech initiative. Phase I provides the eFOTG Web-based application to States (and equivalent) as a framework to establish an official, certified, electronic technical guide for field staff and, in the near future, technical service providers. Phase II implementation, scheduled for November, 2002, provides NRCS field staff and technical service providers the means to create a eFOTG "Thunderbooks" of frequently used material, which can be downloaded to laptops and hand-held computing devices. Attached are two guides explaining how to access and use the eFOTG.

I encourage all employees to become familiar with eFOTG by accessing the online system and understanding the function, applicability, and future development of eFOTG. All employees providing technical assistance need to know how to operate eFOTG and advise clients and technical service providers as to proper use of the system. Currently, NRCS employees are able to access the system by using their PRMS login and password.

Phase I of the eFOTG, began nationally on June 6, 2002, when all NRCS State Offices (and equivalent) were provided access and began to populate the eFOTG. Additional details concerning Phases I and II of the SmarTech initiative are provided in the attached information sheets.

NRCS staff at Headquarters will be working with the Regional Technology Specialists and ITC staff at Fort Collins to conduct a news release and public announcement of the eFOTG site for August 26. We anticipate that public interest in the eFOTG site will grow once the announcement is made. Following the announcement a statewide news release will be sent out

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.

from the State Office. The eFOTG initiative provides an excellent opportunity for NRCS in Maine and NRCS nationally to showcase the technology contained in our Field Office Technical Guide.

I also encourage employees to provide feedback and recommendations for improvement to eFOTG or questions to Christopher Jones, ASTC for Technology and Planning, a 990-9100 Ext #3.

/s/ Russell A. Collett

RUSSELL A. COLLETT
State Conservationist

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ELECTRONIC FIELD OFFICE TECHNICAL GUIDE (eFOTG) INFORMATION SHEET

The Electronic Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG) is the first phase of the SmarTech initiative sponsored by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Science and Technology Consortium. It is a Web-based application that provides States (and equivalent) with a framework to establish an official, certified, electronic FOTG for field staff and, in the near future, third-party vendors. It includes linkage to a Technology Web site on an intranet for all NRCS employees to be called "my.NRCS". Phase I also provides for Content Manager Accounts restricted to individuals with logins authorized by the State Technical Guide Committees (STGCs). The second phase of SmarTech scheduled for deployment in November will involve greater customization of eFOTG, new interactive conservation tools, and a resource data viewer.

Pilot testing a eFOTG was conducted May 9 through 23, 2002. Ten States participated: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Missouri, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Texas. During the pilot, approximately 40 STGC members used the application to enter technical information as Content Manager onto a live production server in the NRCS Web farm. While offering some suggestions for improvement, all agreed that the eFOTG Content Manager tool was easy to use and was an efficient method for updating the FOTG. Their feedback was very positive regarding the ease of navigating through the sections and downloading information. Both Content Managers and field office employees believed the learning curve for gaining proficiency in the use of eFOTG was short and not much training was required.

A few points for your information:

- Initially all NRCS employees will have access to the State (and equivalent) eFOTG through a "my.NRCS" Web site based on their logins. Later during Phase I there will be access for certified third-party vendors and the general public. A State's (and equivalent) eFOTG will contain State Conservation Practice Standards, soils information, and other technical references that have been approved by the STGC. If the information is approved for use in a specific area, e.g., Major Land Resource Area(s) or county(s) rather than statewide, it should be categorized as such in the appropriate section of the eFOTG.
- Links to the National Handbook of Conservation Practices, as well as to other national technical references such as the National Planning Procedures Handbook, will be provided on the "my.NRCS" Technology page, which is separate from the State (and equivalent) eFOTG.
- Phase II implementation, November, 2002, will provide NRCS field staff and third party vendors the means to create FOTG "Thunderbooks" of frequently used material, which can be downloaded to laptops and hand-held computing devices. Deliverables include:
 - "my.NRCS" customizable eFOTG pages
 - SmarTech intelligent search capability
 - Thunderbook download
 - Resource Data Viewer